

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF WEST VIRGINIA**

HENDERSON L. HINTON,

Plaintiff,

v.

**Civil Action No. 5:13cv74
(Judge Stamp)**

B. JENKINS, et al.,

Defendants.

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

On June 7, 2013, the *pro se* plaintiff, who is a federal inmate incarcerated at USP Hazelton, initiated this case by filing a Bivens complaint in which he alleges that a staff member at Hazelton refused to process his legal mail and then retaliated against him when he brought said refusal to the attention of the warden. The plaintiff filed his complaint on the court approved form on July 23, 2013. In addition, he has filed an application to proceed *in forma pauperis* and a prisoner trust account report. Because it is clear, for the reason stated below, that the plaintiff has prematurely filed this complaint, the undersigned finds it appropriate to recommend dismissal without assessment of the filing fees..

Standard of Review

Because the plaintiff is a prisoner seeking redress from a governmental entity or employee, the Court must review the complaint to determine whether it is frivolous or malicious. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b), a court is required to perform a judicial review of certain suits brought by prisoners and must dismiss a case at any time if the court determines that the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief against

a defendant who is immune from such relief.

A complaint is frivolous if it is without arguable merit either in law or in fact. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). However, the court must read *pro se* allegations in a liberal fashion. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972). A complaint which fails to state a claim under Fed.R.Civ.P. 12(b)(6) is not automatically frivolous. See Neitzke at 328. Frivolity dismissals should only be ordered when the legal theories are “indisputably meritless,”¹ or when the claims rely on factual allegations which are “clearly baseless.” Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 32 (1992). This includes claims in which the plaintiff has little or no chance of success. See Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976).

Analysis

Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act (PLRA), a prisoner bringing an action with respect to prison conditions under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, or any other federal law, must first exhaust all available administrative remedies. 42 U.S.C. § 1997(e)(a). Exhaustion as provided in § 1997(e)(a) is mandatory. Booth v. Churner, 532 U.S. 731, 741 (2001). A Bivens action, like an action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, is subject to the exhaustion of administrative remedies. Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516, 524 (2002). The exhaustion of administrative remedies “applies to all inmate suits about prison life, whether they involve general circumstances or particular episodes,”² and is required even when the relief sought is not available. Booth at 741. Because exhaustion is a prerequisite to suit, all available administrative remedies must be exhausted *prior to* filing a complaint in federal court. See Porter, at 524 (citing Booth, 532 U.S. at 741) (emphasis added).

¹ *Id.* at 327.

² *Id.*

Moreover, in Woodford v. Ngo, 548 U.S. 81, 84-85 (2006), the United States Supreme Court found that the PLRA's exhaustion requirement serves three main purposes: (1) to "eliminate unwarranted federal court interference with the administration of prisons"; (2) to "afford corrections officials time and opportunity to address complaints internally before allowing the initiation of a federal case"; and (3) to "reduce the quantity and improve the quality of prisoner suits." Therefore, "the PLRA exhaustion requirement requires *full and proper* exhaustion." Woodford at 92-94 (emphasis added). Full and proper exhaustion includes meeting all the time and procedural requirements of the prison grievance system. *Id.* at 101-102.

The Bureau of Prisons provides a four-step administrative process beginning with attempted informal resolution with prison staff (BP-8). See 28 C.F.R. § 542.10, et seq. If the prisoner achieves no satisfaction informally, he must file a written complaint to the warden (BP-9), within 20 calendar days of the date of the occurrence on which the complaint is based. If an inmate is not satisfied with the warden's response, he may appeal to the regional director of the BOP (BP-10) within 20 days of the warden's response. Finally, if the prisoner has received no satisfaction, he may appeal to the Office of General Counsel (BP-11) within 30 days of the date the Regional Director signed the response.³ An inmate is not deemed to have exhausted his administrative remedies until he has filed his complaint at all levels. 28 C.F.R. § 542.10-542.15; Gibbs v. Bureau of Prison Office,

³"If accepted, a Request or Appeal is considered filed on the date it is logged into the Administrative Remedy Index as received. Once filed, response shall be made by the Warden or CMM. within 20 calendar days; by the Regional Director within 30 calendar days; and by the General Counsel within 40 calendar days...If the time period for response to a Request or Appeal is insufficient to make an appropriate decision, the time for response may be extended once by 20 days at the institution level, 30 days at the regional level, or 20 days at the Central Office level. Staff shall inform the inmate of this extension in writing. Staff shall respond in writing to all filed Requests or Appeals. If the inmate does not receive a response within the time allotted for reply, including extension, the inmate may consider the absence of a response to be a denial at that level." 28 C.F.R. § 542.18.

FCI, 986 F.Supp. 941, 943 (D.Md. 1997).

In Jones v. Bock, 549 U.S. 199 (2007), the United States Supreme Court ruled, among other things, that an inmate's failure to exhaust under the PLRA is an affirmative defense, and an inmate is not required to specifically plead or demonstrate exhaustion in his complaint. Nonetheless, pursuant to the Court's authority under 28 U.S.C. § 1915, it not foreclosed from dismissing a case *sua sponte* on exhaustion grounds, if the failure to exhaust is apparent from the face of the complaint. See Anderson v. XYZ Prison Health Services, 407 F.3d 674, 681-82 (4th Cir. 2005).

In this case, the plaintiff asserts that he will file an appeal (BP-10) to the Mid Atlantic Region. (dckt. 9, p. 5). Therefore, it is clear that the plaintiff did not exhaust his administrative remedies before he filed his complaint. In fact, a careful review of the materials submitted by the plaintiff establishes that the actions he complains of occurred on June 3, 2013, two days before he signed the complaint and a mere four days before his complaint was received by this Court.⁴ Accordingly, it is clear from the face of the complaint that the plaintiff failed to exhaust his claims prior to filing suit and those claims should be dismissed. See Woodford, 548 U.S. at 85 ("Exhaustion is no longer left to the discretion of the district court, but is mandatory.").

Recommendation

For the foregoing reasons, the undersigned recommends that the plaintiff's complaint (dckt. 1) be **DISMISSED without prejudice** for the failure to exhaust administrative remedies. It is further recommended that the plaintiff's application to proceed without prepayment of fees (dckt. 10) be **DENIED as moot**.

Within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy of this Report and

⁴Even if the plaintiff had not acknowledged that he had failed to yet file his BP-10, it would be logistically impossible to complete the administrative remedy process in four days.

Recommendation, any party may file with the Clerk of Court written objections identifying those portions of the recommendation to which objection is made and the basis for such objections. A copy of any objections should also be submitted to the Honorable Frederick P. Stamp, United States District Judge. Failure to timely file objections to this recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of this Court based upon such recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984), cert. denied, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984).

The Clerk is directed to mail a copy of this Report and Recommendation to the *pro se* plaintiff by certified mail, return receipt requested, to his last known address as shown on the docket.

DATED: 7-25-2013



DAVID J. JOEL
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE